

GLOBAL CASE STUDY 7: The Complicated Story of “Amazing Grace”

Link: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-04-30/complicated-story-behind-famous-hymn-amazing-grace>


COUNTRY OF ORIGIN: United Kingdom & United States 

SOURCE: Radio Show (PRI’s Studio 360)

SUMMARY: Written by a British slave trader who had a near-death experience, converted to Christianity, and eventually became an abolitionist, “Amazing Grace” has transcended its status as a Christian hymn since crossing the Atlantic, where it has become an American folk song and Civil Rights anthem.


TASK: Listen to Studio 360’s piece on “Amazing Grace.” Pay particular attention to the evolution of Newton’s “Faith’s Review and Expectation” to the modern version of “Amazing Grace,” and how the music took on new meaning as it was co-opted by different people for different purposes. The first printed version of the hymn with the tune Hephzibah appears below; compare it to the tune it has become associated with, “New Britain.”

Tune: Hephzibah



A - maz - ing grace how sweet the sound! That saved a wretch like me. I
once was lost but now am found, I once was lost but now am found, was
blind but now I see, was blind but now I see, was blind, was blind but now I see.

Tune: New Britain



A - ma - zing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I
once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

ESSAY QUESTION

Choose a song that you enjoy and place it in a timeline of the artist’s or band’s career. Is this song a product of their early, middle, or late years? Compare this song to other songs written by the same artist or band but in later or earlier years. How did the artist’s or band’s style change over time? What do you think caused these changes? When do you think the artist or band peaked, and why? (200–250 words)